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SUBJECT: MOLDOVA: AVIAN INFLUENZA AND TRANSNISTRIA

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service has approved funding for a targeted technical assistance project on Avian Influenza (AI) in the Transnistrian (TN) region of Moldova. Although we face political constraints, TN officials are receptive to the idea, acknowledging that they are not prepared for an AI outbreak. USDA will coordinate efforts with USAID's regional AI project, which also plans TN outreach. These efforts will bring much needed technical assistance to TN, increasing capacity, ensuring human safety, and helping to build linkages between the left and right banks of the Dniester River. END SUMMARY.

MEETING THE "MINISTER" OF HEALTH AND CHIEF VET

¶2. (SBU) On March 6, econoff and regional agricultural counselor Susan Reid met with Transnistrian "minister" of health Ivan Tkachenko, deputy "minister" Svetlana Arkadieva, and chief veterinary officer (CVO) Valerii Tkachenko in Tiraspol to discuss USDA's planned technical assistance project. Indicative of the political obstacles our efforts in TN face, emboffs were delayed one hour at the "internal border" by the TN migration service. Finally, emboffs were allowed to enter after Tkachenko spoke directly with TN "president" Smirnov. (NOTE: Transnistria is a separatist region outside the control of the central government in Chisinau. END NOTE.)

¶3. (SBU) Tkachenko, who serves as the TN humanitarian assistance coordinator, apologized for the delay, noting that TN was open to all humanitarian assistance. Tkachenko acknowledged that AI was a global health threat that did not respect internal political differences. Reid noted USDA's efforts around the world to combat and manage AI outbreaks. She explained that USDA's proposal for Moldova focused on a joint technical conference for left- and right-bank Moldovan veterinarians and a public education campaign in TN.

¶4. (SBU) Tkachenko responded that TN had limited contact with Moldovan Government (GOM) veterinarians, but welcomed training for TN veterinarians. He added that TN had an agreement on cooperation with the GOM in the health sector. He hoped that joint training might lead to a similar agreement with the GOM on veterinary cooperation. Separately, CVO Tkachenko noted that he enjoyed good relations with Chisinau, spoke informally with GOM veterinary officials when needed, and sent samples for testing to GOM laboratories.

TN LACKS CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO AN AI OUTBREAK

¶5. (SBU) The minister and CVO Tkachenko noted that TN veterinarians had received basic AI training; however, they lacked training

materials and technical capacity to respond to an AI outbreak. Reid explained that because of limited funding, USDA could not organize a full-scale simulation exercise in Moldova. However, she offered to fund the participation of one TN veterinarian at an upcoming USDA-USAID sponsored conference in Bulgaria, which will include a large-scale field exercise. (NOTE: We will follow up directly with the "minister," reiterating that the person nominated will be considered a technical expert, not/not a representative of the TN authorities. END NOTE.)

¶6. (SBU) In a separate meeting, TN veterinary officials were very receptive to the USDA proposal and offered to cover travel, hotel, meals, and conference venue expenses for the participants. USDA is re-working the project's budget to see what additional activities might be conducted with the freed-up funds.

¶7. (SBU) USAID local staff informed Reid that USAID had a final approved work plan for AI assistance to Moldova which included one activity in TN this summer. Emboffs' recent meetings in TN have set the stage for the USAID project to proceed jointly with the USDA project.

BROADENING SUPPORT FOR THE PROJECT

¶8. (SBU) In an effort to build broad political support for the AI project, emboffs also briefed Evgenia Petrova, Economic Adviser to the Speaker of the TN Supreme Soviet (parliament). Petrova welcomed the briefing and promised to inform Speaker Shevchuk. She also suggested the possibility of future financial support from the Supreme Soviet. Emboffs promised to keep her informed as the project moved forward.

COMMENT

¶9. (SBU) The unexpected offers of financial support from both the Economic Adviser and the CVO show a real interest in working with us on this project. We understand that political constraints could limit our efforts; however, we are committed to expanding our TN engagement. Not only can this project address a public health threat, but it can also help build bridges between the left and right banks.

KIRBY